

FIRST RECORDS
OF
ANGLO-AMERICAN COLONIZATION.

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THE

FIRST RECORDS

OF

ANGLO-AMERICAN COLONIZATION:

THEIR HISTORY

BY

JOHN WINGATE THORNTON.

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C A M B R I D G E :
A L L E N A N D F A R N H A M , P R I N T E R S .

P R E F A C E .

CIVILIZED nations eagerly welcome the minutest details respecting their primitive seats, early migrations, and settlements; their origin, qualities, and institutions; whether extorted from the secrets of philology, exhumed from the earth, or found in a recovered manuscript. The tessellated pavement of a Roman villa, the roll of Battle Abbey, the Doomsday Book of the Conqueror, the Charter of Runnymede, a leaf from Caxton's "Playe of Chesse," the Autograph of Shakspeare, are among the most treasured things of England.

This tract discloses in our own National possession the twice lost manuscript Records of our own origin, of perhaps more pregnant interest to us, as a people, than is any document which England holds of her own primitive history.

Now that we know of such a treasure, in possession of our National Government, shall it not be rescued from the hazards of time and accident, against which it has been providentially and wonderfully preserved, by its publication in a manner fitting our National duty and honor?

THE FIRST RECORDS OF ANGLO-AMERICAN COLONIZATION.

THE records of the Commercial Companies in England for the colonization of America constitute the Genesis and Exodus of our English-American history ; and the publication of these original documents would be a splendid and invaluable service to American history, worthy of our National Government.

Passing Cabot's patent of March 5, 1496, Gilbert's of June 11, 1578, and intermediate documents, we come to the incorporation April 10, 1606, of certain "adventurers" for colonizing "that part of America commonly called Virginia," and extending from the thirty-fourth to the forty-fifth degree of latitude. They were divided into two companies, one of which, the London Company, had the southern portion of the territory. This corporation kept a record of its transactions till its virtual suppression by proclamation, July 15, 1624.

King James the First's darling project of a Spanish match for his son Charles was then on foot, and he was persuaded by Gondomar, the unscrupulous but faithful minister of Spain, to destroy this great commercial company, in order to conciliate the Spanish court, and secure the coveted marriage.

The most active of these “adventurers” was Nicholas Ferrar, a London merchant, associated with Sir Thomas and Sir Hugh Middleton, in the commerce of both the East and West Indies. Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir John Hawkins, Sir Francis Drake, Sir Edwin Sandys, and their compeers were frequent guests at his table. His third son, Nicholas, born Feb. 23, 1592, was the friend of George Herbert, and is specially remembered in Izaak Walton’s life of the poet. Izaak mentions two other names in this memoir, interesting to New England readers. One is Dr. Arthur Lake, Bishop of Bath and Wells, the friend of John White of Dorchester,—illustrious men,—named by Hugh Peters as the two who “occasioned, yea, founded that work” of colonizing Massachusetts. So zealous was Lake in the great scheme, that he declared to White “he would go himself but for his age.” The good Bishop died May 4, 1626, so that he must have intended to join the colony while at Cape Ann, under the heroic Governor Conant, for it was not till the fall of that year that Conant removed the Colony to Salem.

The other character referred to is Mr. Herbert Thorndike, Fellow of Trinity College, Prebendary of Westminster, and one of the editors of the Polyglot Bible. His works on the “Church” are standard authorities. His brother, Mr. John Thorndike, an early settler of the Massachusetts Colony, was one of the founders of Ipswich, and the ancestor of a worthy New England family. Mr. Thorndike died in England, and the graves of the Church Prebendary and his Puritan brother are side by side in Westminster Abbey.

But to return to Nicholas Ferrar, Junior; after several years of travel on the continent, among the learned and great, he returned to England in 1618, and died Monday, Dec. 2, 1637. Some years later, about the year 1654, materials for a memoir of this gentleman, were prepared

by his brother, Mr. John Ferrar, who had been Deputy Governor of the Virginia Company, for some three years. These, with materials from other sources, were edited and published by the Rev. Dr. Peter Peckard of Magdalen College, Cambridge, in 1790; and this volume is the sole depository of much of the history of the Virginia Company, especially while under the control of Lord Southampton, Sir Edwin Sandys, and Mr. Ferrar, Jr.,—1617 to 1624,—who placed its affairs in the most prosperous condition. Nicholas Ferrar deserves our grateful remembrance, and demands our highest regard, as the very *soul* of that colonization scheme. The republication of this work would open a new volume of our earlier existence, a most valuable chapter in Anglo-American history, in its moral and social aspect, a phase, though most important, yet most difficult to preserve, because of its evanescent character. It is not, cannot be, set forth in records and in diplomacy,—always and necessarily, more or less deceptive,—and its spirit is only feebly discerned by the most elaborate analysis of the wisest student. In this view the life of Ferrar is of unparalleled interest. We commend it to the attention of the Virginia Historical Society. Ferrar was the author of all the various letters of instruction to the Colonial Governors and to the Colony; of the defences against the chicanery and assaults of Gondomar, at the council table, and in courts; to him all went for advice and information, and in him centred all the Company's affairs. In one of the hearings against the Company at the Council Chamber the Marquis of Hamilton said, "that there was one letter which he prayed might be read over again, on which he should desire to make a few observations; which being accordingly done, Well! said he, my Lords, we have spent many hours here, in hearing all these letters and instructions, and yet I could not help requesting to hear this

one letter over again ; because I think that all your Lordships must agree with me that it is absolutely a masterpiece. And indeed they are all in a high degree excellent. Truly, my Lords, we have this day lost no time at all. For I do assure you that if our attendance here were for many days, I, for my part, would willingly sit them out to hear so pious, so wise, and indeed politic instructions, as these are. They are papers as admirably well penned as any I ever heard. And I believe, if the truth were known, your Lordships are all of the same opinion.” The Earl of Pembroke said : “ They all deserve the highest commendation ; containing advices far more excellent than I could have expected to have met with in the letters of a trading company. For they abound with soundness of good matter, and profitable instruction with respect both to religion and policy ; and they possess uncommon elegance of language. . . . That these papers before us are the production of one* pen is very plainly discernible.”

Foreseeing that Gondomar, by means of the King, and the Spanish party at court, would probably ruin the Company, and take away all their records, registers, and instructions, and all other writings of the Company, Mr. Ferrar, at his own cost, and at an expense of above £50, procured a fair copy of them, carefully collated with the originals, and attested upon oath by the examiners to be true copies. After the seizure of the original documents, Mr. Ferrar informed Sir Edwin Sandys, and other of his intimate friends, of these treasures in his possession, furnishing evidence of the late company’s honorable and upright proceedings, disproving Gondomar’s charges of their bad faith, and intended plans against the Spanish

* Some curious coincidences between Ferrar’s manuscripts and the church classic known as Fuller’s “ Holy and Profane State,” and queries which they suggest, may be found in an article in the Boston Evening Transcript of February 26th, 1859.

colonies and mines. The papers were then deposited with Lord Southampton; but soon after, apprehensive for their safety, he placed them in the custody of Sir R. Killigrew, who, upon his death, left them to the care of the Earl of Dorset, in whose keeping Mr. John Ferrar supposed them to be, at the time of his writing, about 1654. At the request of Dr. Peckard, about 1790, the Duke of Dorset's library was searched for these records, but only some detached papers of the Virginia Company were found, extracts from which were printed by Peckard.

These original papers are of great interest, and are nowhere else to be found; but those published seem to have been only a small portion of the collection. Dr. Peckard says: "There are still in my possession many original papers referring to the patent, and the proceedings of the principal adventurers under that authority; many examinations and depositions taken on oath, and clearly evincing the shameful practices that had been used against the Company. There are also many papers of a different sort, proving the integrity and honor of the Company in all their proceedings; showing their intentions, and projects for iron-works; their plans for raising and multiplying mulberry trees; and their truly patriotic designs in various other articles of great importance: their schemes for laying out their allotments; for experiments in order to improve and cultivate their lands to the best account; particularly a letter to Mr. Ferrar upon this subject, signed Nicholas Hyde [Chief Justice of the King's Bench], from the Middle Temple, May 9, 1622. There are also many other papers containing accurate registers of the persons sent over, male or female, the county, parish, age, and occupation of each, with directions for their proper accommodation." These ought, if possible, to be recovered, and published in connection with the Company's records and history.

Here we leave the memoirs of Ferrar, and turn to Virginia for further information about these natal records of a State, — rather of a Nation. Stith, the excellent historian of Virginia, writing in 1747, hands down to us the following account of them, which he had “received *many years ago*, in conversation with Col. Byrd and Sir John Randolph.” Col. Byrd’s father, being in England in 1667, at the time of the death of the Duke of Southampton, purchased these records of that nobleman’s executors for sixty guineas. Stith also states that “this copy was taken by the order and for the use of the Earl of Southampton, the Company’s treasurer at that time;” but it appears, that not to him, but to Ferrar, belongs the credit of preserving these invaluable records. Stith says they “are a journal of the Company’s proceedings from day to day; and are written in two large folio volumes, on a kind of elephant paper, generally in a very fair and legible hand. Each page is subscribed by *Edward Collingwood*, the Company’s secretary; thus, *Com. Collingwood*; which is, as I take it, *Compared, Collingwood*. Besides which there is a testification at the end of each volume. At the end of the first, under the hands of *Edward Waterhouse* and *Edward Collingwood*, Secretaries of the two Companies for *Virginia* and the *Somer Islands*, that they had compared that with the original Court-book, and found it to be a true and perfect copy of the same, except the omission of one court and part of another. The second volume is signed by the said Secretary *Collingwood*, and *Thomas Collet* of the Middle Temple, Gentleman, testifying the same thing, except in a few immaterial points, where were wanted some original papers. These volumes only contain the Company’s proceedings for a little above five years, namely, from April 28, 1619, to June 7, 1624; including the whole time of Sir Edwin Sandys’s and the Earl of Southampton’s administration. However, they are not a brief and summary

entry of the principal points and matters concluded upon, according to the common methods of courts, but give, at length, the chief speeches, reasons, and debates, that happened in their courts during that time. And as it was a period of vast contest and dispute, they often recur back to former times and transactions, and thereby give us *a clear idea and account of the chief matters and proceedings of the Company, almost from its first institution and foundation.*"

Stith made but partial use of these records, for reasons which we give in his own words: "I once intended (as Bishop Burnet has done, in a very useful and satisfactory manner, in his History of the Reformation) to have added several other very curious papers and original pieces of record. But I perceived, to my no small surprise and mortification, that some of my countrymen (and those, too, persons of high fortune and distinction) seemed to be much alarmed, and to grudge that a complete history of their own country would run to more than one volume and cost them above half a pistole. I was, therefore, obliged to restrain my hand, and only to insert these few most necessary instruments for fear of enhancing the price, to the immense charge and irreparable damage of such generous and public-spirited gentlemen."

Stith, the author of this spicier sentence, was a grandson of William Randolph of Henrico County, whose brother Isham Randolph had grandsons, Thomas Jefferson and James Pleasants.

The records were afterwards found among Sir John Randolph's papers, and, though claimed by Edmund Randolph, they are said to have come to Congress as part of Jefferson's collections, and are now in the law library at Washington. They are written in the style peculiar to official records of that period.

The first volume begins with April 28, 1619, "a Quarter Court held for Virginia at Sir Thomas Smith's house

in Philpott Lane," and ends 8th of May, 1622, and the copy is attested by Ed. Waterhouse and Ed. Collingwood. The second volume, a continuation of the first, commencing May 20, 1622, and ending April 28, 1624, is attested by Thomas Collet and Ed. Collingwood.

There is also a volume of Virginia Company papers and records, 1621-1625, of about 160 pages, containing letters, proclamations, patents, in 1622, 1623; correspondence 1625, transactions in council and assembly, the petition of the Company, and his Majesty's answer.*

They are alluded to in the Preface to the Virginia Statutes at Large, and Conway Robinson cites them in his Jurisprudence of Virginia.

As these volumes are of National interest, reaching back to the very *foundation of the English companies for colonizing America*; as they have escaped the chances and mishaps of two centuries, on either side of the Atlantic; as they have not been used by our historians, lying virtually unknown; and as Providence has now placed them in the keeping of our National Congress, — *is it not our National duty to have them appropriately edited and published, with all that the Archives of England contain respecting both the London and the Plymouth Companies?*

* Richard Randolph, Esq., of Hanover, Virginia, from whose obliging hand several of these particulars are obtained, informs me that there is a series of early manuscript volumes, in Richmond, of an important historical character. A minute description of them is desirable.

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